

I John 5:1-5 ▪ The Beauty of Belief

Ryan Perz ▪ May 16, 2021

Faith; Love; Religious Obedience; Victory and Defeat

To help us see the beauty of believing in the Lord Jesus, and the life of love, obedience, and victory it secures.

Intro: There is a dreaded but necessary word in our English language that begins with the letter “T”.

Test. Most of us dislike tests.

I once audited a class a few years ago at the local Christian college in the town we lived in. It was beautiful because when test time came, I got to sit back, and check baseball scores when all the juniors and seniors were taking their tests.

The truth is—the only reason I got to that point was because for about a decade I spent in taking the tests.

The point is: none of us can escape tests.

—You need tests to pass grade school, middle and high school.

—You need tests to get a driver’s permit and license.

—Whether you go into a trade, college, military...in order to advance, there are tests.

—Some of you still have to test to keep up with continuing education.

Life is full of tests.

—Even when you retire, there are still tests: they may be in the form of test results from blood work....but they are always there.

- We can’t escape it spiritually either.

2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

- Just to review one more time: 1 John weaves 3 different tests throughout this letter—truth, love, and obedience.
- Sharing the same burden that Paul did: Test yourselves.
- In these 5 verses—it’s something of a comprehensive test under one heading: faith.

Some of you might remember blue books. Not the thing where you find the value of the vehicle. A blue book was a small little notebook with 20 or so blank pages.

When a professor told us to get a blue book, it meant that he was giving a comprehensive exam. All the knowledge will be tested.

I had a professor once who was pretty brutal with his comps. He would give us 10 essay questions to prep for. We would have to know how to answer all of them by writing an essay on the fly. Expect to write for 40 minutes for each. But he would only pick 3 questions.

The other 7 questions would not make it.

God does not test like that. He does not make us guess; and he does not only test on only 30 percent.

We will focus in on what is on the test—the tests that show whether our faith is there.

--Examine yourselves

--Test yourselves

Belief and Love (1)

- Belief is the dominant focus; it frames the passage (1,5).
- Belief is tied to the *doctrine test*.

1. Believe that Jesus is Christ (Messiah)

Calvin reminds us,

“to believe that he is the Christ, is to hope from him all those things which have been promised as to the Messiah”

—forgiveness, redemption, joy, peace, restoration, eternal life

2. Believe that Jesus is Son of God

—No ordinary man, but the One who is unique in his status and role

- Something essential is connected to belief—whoever believes “has been born of God”.
- This is called regeneration/new birth—notice that the passage indicates that it enables belief.

Our understanding of how Grace works hinges on this

It looks pretty clear that Regeneration happens before faith.

Yet the second half of v1 reminds us that belief follows regeneration, but love *must* follow from belief.

- › Where there is true belief, there will be true love—the kind that is Christlike, and family-directed (to the children of God).

I appreciate the word that Matthew Henry gives us about *pure love*:

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume
1 John 5:1–5

“Our love to them appears to be sound and genuine when we love them not merely upon any secular account, as because they are rich, or learned, or kind to us, or of our denomination among religious parties; but because they are God’s children, his regenerating grace appears in them.”

Do we pass that test?

Love and Obedience (2-3)

- The way that this passage section is structured—picture a sandwich. In technical terms it called a chiasitic structure. The outer layer (bread) is belief—the middle part is the meat. Here is the meat: (burger, Pimento cheese, BBQ)
- Love is the meat—but to get the meat, we taste what surrounds it.

Picture love being the meat, but there is this delicious, tasty sauce that is spread on the outside of the meat. Or the burger is coated in a great-tasting cheese.

What surrounds love? Obedience.

When we obey, what follows is loving God’s children.

- Biblical love takes a concrete form: obedience to God’s commands.
- Some have thought those are polar opposites—some with hyper grace theology think that obedience is some form of legalism.

But that’s far from true:

John 14:15 ESV

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

- But verse 2 is not primarily about our love for Christ—it's love for others....

This also gives another slant on our devotional life, doesn't it? It's easy to compartmentalize our devotional life to self-soul care. We prioritize being pietistic — seeing our bible reading and prayer mainly connected to myself, my own godliness...my spiritual life.

There is certainly that aspect.

But, if God's commands help me love others, then the time I spend in the Word is not merely for myself. It's also my way of living in godliness and harmony with others.

The time I spend in the Word daily—throughout the day, helps me to live with my wife, family, and church family.

Romans 15:2–4 ESV

“Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.’ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

- › Our intake of scripture, feeds and strengthens our love for God's commands—which is the energy for loving others.

In other words, loving the Bible is a way we love others.

This also helps us in giving a God-inspired foundation of love.

In today's world someone may say: “If you don't accept me for who I am, then you don't really love me. Or, if you don't agree with my decision—me being my authentic self—then you are not loving. You are just a judgmental hypocrite”.

If we just go with our gut and feelings, we may say: they are right!

But at end of the day, unless we have God's inspired truth of his word shaping our love, it will not be true love...and may end up being mere cultural conformity.

An additional comment is necessary: “...And his commands are not burdensome”.

Not burdensome-not oppressive or crushing (Akin)

Jesus told us that man-made rules quickly burden.

Matthew 23:4 ESV

“They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”

The commands of men--the standards of other people-- can be a downward pull; they can become a crushing burden....but not God's commands.

The way of discipleship is the opposite.

Matthew 11:30 ESV

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

- Another way to see it—Jesus’ commands are not overwhelming when our hearts have been renewed by the Spirit (Jer. 31:33)—his laws will be etched on our hearts and minds.

God commands do not overwhelm; instead they set free. They free us to walk in the way of love, joy, and peace.

When we think of God’s commands, we should picture wings on a bird. Wings on a bird are the God-given gift for the bird to have freedom to fly.

Psalm 19:11 ESV

“Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.”

Born-again believers have this positive view of God’s commands.

They see that there is a greater freedom...a beauty!

Francis Schaeffer in *True Spirituality*:

“True spirituality is more than refraining from a certain external list of taboos in a mechanical way.”

Is your spirituality “true” in the sense that it has a positive posture? That you don’t see God’s commands as a crushing burden, but a great freedom?

That’s passing the obedience test—it begins in the heart.

Obedience, Overcoming and Faith (4-5)

- Another way that we can feel burdened is when we feel like we are fighting a losing battle.

Just imagine if you woke up each day and you knew that everything you would do would turn into a fail.

- Every task would be frustrated
- Every part of your work fall apart
- Your finances fail, your health fails, your relationships fail

**IF that's how you went into each day...you would feel very burdened, ready to give up.

- v4a explains why God's commands are not burdensome—it's the cause for not being burdened: *everyone born of God overcomes*.
- The first verb (overcome) is present tense—means two things 1. that the battle is ongoing; 2. also that the *continuous victory is possible*.

Faith is the central concern here (v4).

In the Bible, the emphasis is on the object of the Faith—the Lord Jesus....not the subjective experience.

- › Faith anchors me in the person and promises of Jesus.

Scripture is more concerned with who I trust than how I feel.

In our day it's usually reversed.

- First, everyone born of him overcomes the world: It's the *birthright* of every child of God not to be overcome by sin and Satan.
- Second, the means of this victory is faith. *Faith and belief are the same words in the original (faith in the English is the noun, belief is always the verb).
- The same is true with overcoming/victory—they come from the same word group; can be translated to overcome, conquer.

My theme for 2021 is crush it. I tell my kids before they go to school—Crush it. At staff meeting I tell the staff when they are facing a challenge: crush it. I'm just waiting for the wall decor to show up in our house—Crush it!

That's how the Bible sounds...in Christ, through faith---you are going to Crush it!

Romans 16:20 ESV

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

Romans 8:37 ESV

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

Brothers and sisters—*in Christ, you can crush it; you will crush it!* Don't let the enemy of your soul say otherwise

bitterness, hatred, jealousy, strife, envy, slander, gossip—Crush it!

greed, lust, gluttony, self-indulgence—Crush it!

fear, worry, anxiety, despair, doubt—Crush it!

Romans 6:14 ESV

“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

1 Corinthians 15:57 ESV

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The test is passed through Jesus—through faith in him.

Conclusion:

- We come full circle, and also hear the poetic beauty in the truth.

Last week after the service a church member who loves the Word mentioned that repetition is not only there to remind us—but can be there poetically for us to savor the beauty. 1 John has that flavor—there is a poetic beauty.

Some may not care for poetry—but if you like music chances are you appreciate it more than you realize.

This helps us see the test from a different angle maybe.

Another test is one that musicians undergo. Memorizing scales, learning theory---in order to play a beautiful piece.

Maybe our aversion to tests is that we don't see the beauty—they seem kind of mechanical.

But listen to Yo Yo Ma play Bach's Cello suites—there is a beauty and glory in it.

He got there by passing tests.

The goal of the test is to put beauty on display

As we close, I want to ask two simple questions:

1. Do you believe?

2. Is there beauty in your belief?

Is it marked by the beauty of love, obedience, and victory?

2 Corinthians 3:17–18 ESV

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

May the Lord work in us the beauty of Christ in vibrant love, obedience, faith, and victory.